Research Notes for Thomas Emperor (1815 - 1896)

Research Overview:

Thomas Emperor was born in 1815 in Brosna, County Kerry, Ireland, into a family bearing an unusually rare surname. He appears in records as the son of John and Ellen Emperor, a relationship supported by his 1896 Michigan death record, but otherwise thinly documented. His early life in Ireland is sparsely recorded beyond birthplace, family members, and the births of his children. What makes Thomas compelling is not the richness of his Irish documentation, but the tension between a small body of contemporary evidence, later family memory, and a wider cluster of Emperor men whose exact relationships remain unresolved.

Thomas married Mary Hogan in Ireland before 1839, and they had at least five children there before emigrating. The family arrived in the United States by 1865, with earlier passenger and census records raising questions about the timing and circumstances of their migration. Some records suggest Thomas may have arrived earlier, possibly without his wife and children, but this has not been resolved. By the late 1860s, Thomas and Mary were in Michigan, where they appear in census records living with their son John and working as day laborers. Their movements through New York and Michigan reflect economic necessity rather than opportunity, and their household remained closely tied to adult children.

By 1880, Thomas and Mary were living in Kent County, Michigan, where Thomas later worked as a flagman for the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad. The family clustered geographically, with sons, brothers, and extended Emperor relatives living nearby. The presence of multiple Emperor households in the same neighborhood, and the later naming of Emperor Street, point to a visible family presence in Grand Rapids, even as the earlier Irish connections remained unclear. Thomas's life in the United States is more fully documented than his life in Ireland, but it does not resolve questions about the origins of the Emperor family.

The central unresolved problem in Thomas Emperor's story is the relationship among four Emperor men—Thomas, James, Cornelius, and Lawrence—who appear in U.S. records as Irish-born contemporaries but whose parentage is inconsistently reported. Family tradition places their

origins in France before Ireland, while documentary records consistently state Ireland as their birthplace. Conflicting death records name different parents, and Irish tithe records place Emperors in neighboring townlands across Cork, Kerry, and Limerick. These records suggest proximity and possible kinship, but they do not establish whether these men were brothers or cousins.

Thomas died in Grand Rapids in 1896, a few months after the death of his wife, Mary. His death record anchors one critical point—that his parents were John and Ellen Emperor—but leaves unanswered how that family fits into the small and scattered Emperor presence in Ireland. Thomas Emperor's life is best understood as part of a larger, unresolved family problem: a rare surname, clustered migrations, conflicting parentage, and a gap between family memory and surviving records. "The evidence is consistent about Thomas's identity and his connection to other Emperor men, but it does not resolve where the family originated or how those men were related."

Time Line:

29 Jan 1815 - Birth at Brosna, Kerry, Ireland.[1]

Thomas Emperor, son of John and Ellen Emperor, was born in Ireland.

1830 - Birth of sister Johanna Emperor (1830) in Ireland.[2]

1838 - Marriage to Mary Hogan, possible date and possibly in County Kerry or County Cork, Ireland. [3]

He married Mary Hogan in Ireland before 1839. Thomas and Mary (Hogan) Emperor were the parents of at least five children, all born in Ireland.

1839 - Birth of daughter Ellen Emperor (1839 - 1880) at Cork, Ireland.[4]

20 Jun 1840 - Birth of son John T Emperor (1840 - 1914) in Ireland.[5]

2 Feb 1841 - Birth of daughter Mary Elizabeth Emperor (1841 - 1921) in Ireland.[6]

Jun 1843 - Birth of daughter Mary Ellen "Nellie" Emperor (1843 - 1904) at Cork, Ireland.[7]

11 Dec 1850 - Arrival at Boston, Massachusetts.[8]

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[1] Birth

[2] Birth of sister Johanna Emperor

[3] Marriage to Mary Hogan

[4] Birth of daughter Ellen Emperor

[5] Birth of son John T Emperor

[6] Birth of daughter Mary Elizabeth Emperor

[7] Birth of daughter Mary Ellen "Nellie" Emperor

[8] "United States Index to Passenger Arrivals, Atlantic and Gulf Ports, 1820-1874", , *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:KD5J-KR4: Fri Mar 08 10:40:33 UTC 2024), Entry for Thos Emperor, 1850.

Port of Arrival: Boston.

Note: It is unclear whether this arrival refers to the same Thomas Emperor listed elsewhere in these records, or whether his wife and children traveled with him.

Place of Origin: Ireland

Ship: Rio Grande

National Archives Series Number M277

National Archives Roll 36

1865 New York Census

.[9]

Thomas Emperer

Mary Emperer

John Emperer

Mary Emperer

1870 - U.S. Census - Kalamazoo, Kalamazoo, Michigan.[10]

Thomas and Mary immigrated to the United States around 1861 or 1862, with their children arriving at about the same time. They may have lived briefly in New York before moving on to Michigan; their son, John T. Emperor, enlisted in the Union army in New York in 1862.

By 1870, Thomas and Mary were living in Kalamazoo, Michigan, in the household of their son John Emperor. Both were recorded as age fifty-five, and Thomas was employed as a day laborer. Thomas and his son John were listed as male United States citizens in that census.

[9] "New York State Census, 1865", , *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QVNF-PQ8T: Tue Jul 16 12:11:07 UTC 2024), Entry for Thomas Emperer and Mary Emperer, 1865.

[10] "United States Census, 1870", , *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MHHT-BKW: Tue Mar 05 08:57:33 UTC 2024), Entry for John Emperson and Margaret Emperson, 1870.

1880 - U.S. Census, at Wyoming, Kent, Michigan.[11]

Thomas Emperor, 64

Mary Emperor, 63

Thomas McShane, 15

1880 - Death of daughter Helen Emperor McShane (1813 - 1880) at Detroit, Wayne, Michigan. [12]

Sep 1888 - Death of father John Emperor (1796 - 1888) at Tralee, Kerry, Ireland. [13]

By the late 1880s, Thomas and Mary Emperor had moved to Grand Rapids, Kent County, Michigan.

Thomas Emperor resided at 368 Straight Avenue in Grand Rapids in 1890 and worked as a flagman for the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad. Living nearby was his son John Emperor at 146 Butterworth and his brother Lawrence Emperor's family, also on Straight Avenue. Today, there is an Emperor Street in the same neighborhood of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

26 Feb 1896 - Death of wife Mary Hogan (1816 - 1896) at Grand Rapids, Kent, Michigan. [14]

Mary died of Bright's disease, she was 79 years, 10 months and 26 days old.

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[11] 1880 U.S. Federal Census (Population Schedule), Wyoming, Kent, Michigan, Roll: 587; Family History Film: 1254587; Page: 143C; Enumeration District: 129; Image, "1800 United States Federal Census," Ancestry.

[12] Death of daughter Helen Emperor McShane

[13] Death of father John Emperor

[14] Michigan, Death Records, 1867-1950, Mary Emperor

30 Apr 1896 - Death at Grand Rapids, Kent, Michigan. [15]

A few months after the death of his wife, Thomas Emperor died of apoplexy in Grand Rapids.

May - Burial at St. Andrews Cemetery in Grand Rapids, Kent, Michigan.[16]

"Emperor - Thomas, 146 Butterworth avenue, April 30, aged eighty-one years, apoplexy. St. Andrew's."

[15] "Michigan Deaths, 1867-1897", , *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:N3KK-R3P: Mon Mar 11 00:10:46 UTC 2024), Entry for Thomas Emperor and John Emperor, 1896.

[16] "Find a Grave Index," database, *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QVK1-QV1W : 3 June 2020), Thomas Emperor, 1896; Burial, , ; citing record ID , *Find a Grave*, http://www.findagrave.com.

Appendix:

Correspondence with Lorne Bentley (Emperor descendant)

I received two emails from Lorne Bentley, who identified himself as an Emperor descendant. He provided limited family information and did not supply documentation or DNA evidence.

Bentley stated that his knowledge of the Emperor family traced back to County Cork, Ireland. He identified a man named Patrick Emperor, born in 1795, as a possible patriarch and believed—without certainty—that Patrick's father may have been Christopher Emperor. According to Bentley, the family lived in the townland of Cummery Connell in County Cork, near the borders of counties Kerry and Limerick. He also reported that another relative suggested possible connections to either Kerry or Limerick.

Bentley emphasized the rarity of the Emperor surname, noting that by the 1980s only one individual with the surname Emperor was living in Ireland. On that basis, he suggested a possible kinship connection through a brother or cousin of Patrick Emperor. He did not take a DNA test but expressed general interest in the idea.

Bentley mentioned that he possessed additional Emperor records stored at his winter home in Sarasota and repeatedly offered to mail them, though no records were ever provided. He also reported having hired a genealogist in the past, whom he found unhelpful. No new documentary evidence resulted from this correspondence.

B. Diane Southard is an Emperor descendant. I asked for, and she gave me access to her DNA test. I gave her access to my Aunt Mary Whalen's DNA tests. Two days later, she stopped my access. Diane's email is dianeemp22@gmail.com

C.

John Emperor was born in Ireland about 1796 and died in Ireland. His children, with his wife, Ellen, including Thomas, James, and Cornelius, did not remain in Ireland but immigrated to the United States in the mid to late

1800s. They settled in various locations, including Michigan, Maine, New York, and Massachusetts.

The surname Emperor is a very unusual name in Ireland. The earliest evidence found of John Emperor, the supposed father of brothers Cornelius, Lawrence, Thomas, and James, is in the tithe applotment record of Clonfert civil parish, Co. Cork. Only three people with this surname were found in Ireland's tithe applotment books. All three resided in Clonfert civil parish. John and Thomas Emperor were listed in the townland of Glannakeel, and Christopher Emperor in the townland of Comminconnell. Clonfert civil parish borders both Co. Limerick and Co. Kerry. The civil parish of Brosna in Co. Kerry is very close to Clonfert in Co. Cork. It is possible that the John found in the tithe applotment record might be the ancestor.

It is also likely that Thomas and Christopher are relatives. More research will be done on the Christopher Emperor family of Canada and New York. Records they generated may yield additional information about the place of origin in Ireland. The following maps illustrate the proximity of Brosna, County Kerry to Clonfert, County Cork, Ireland.

Christopher "Kit" Emperor is mentioned in the book *Meini: The Blasket Nurse* by Leslie Matson. In it, Christopher's granddaughter, Meini, outlines the Kit Emperor family tree. However, this family tree lacks supporting documentation or footnotes due to the book's narrative style.

Within the same townland of Ballykeen, a house belonging to Thomas Emperor was recorded in 1850. Given the unusual and striking nature of the Emperor surname, various origin stories emerged, one claiming Thomas was a Spaniard whose ancestors had arrived in Ireland during the Smerwick Massacre in November 1580.

In reality, the Emperor family held land near Rockchapel on the Cork-Limerick border, some of which remains in the family's name today. Modern descendants have little knowledge of their origins, apart from vague references to Spain and France, though the most likely explanation points to English roots.

Kit Emperor (short for Christopher) was first noted running a mill in Ballincota, near Ventry. However, there is evidence that the family also had connections with the village of Boolteens near Castlemaine at the peninsula's head. Kit was a skilled carpenter who operated the mill in Ballincota with at least one brother.

Around 1830, Kit married Mary Fitzgerald from Ventry parish. Though the house in Dunquin was listed in his name (or perhaps a son's, Thomas) in 1850, the marriage likely ended by then. Kit may never have lived in Dunquin himself; his wife may have relocated there to be near his sister, Bridget, who had married a Malone from Coomenoule. Kit eventually sailed for America, leaving his wife, a young son, and an unborn daughter named Marie, affectionately called Meireas. It's almost certain he never returned to Ireland.

Around 1855, Sean Keating married Meireas "Impire" (Emperor) and brought her to his home. According to their granddaughter, they had six children, including Siobhan (Johanna), Marie, and Ellen (Nora), who was baptized in 1866. Siobhan later married Paddy O Crimhthain, brother of Thomas O'Crimhthain, "The Islandman," and moved to the Great Blasket, where she had two sons before her early death. These sons later settled in the United States and briefly returned in the family's story. Their father also spent a short time in America but ultimately returned to live out most of his years on the Blaskets. Marie Keating married Sean Jacko O'Shea around 1872, moving a few miles from Dunquin to Bailie, near Ballyferriter.

D.

I want to connect the four Emperor men my Great Aunt Helen Roach mentioned to see how they are related. While I've learned much about them and their descendants, I need to locate U.S. records that may reveal their parents' names. This will help determine if Thomas, Cornelius, and the other two men were brothers or cousins.

In addition, I aim to understand the Emperor family in Ireland better. Since "Emperor" is a rare Irish surname, I'm curious about its origins and what makes it distinctly Irish. I have a book about Christopher Emperor's granddaughter, who worked as a wet nurse on Basket Island, and I hope it will provide more insight into the family and their way of life during that period.

Finally, I need to locate any missing records highlighted in red on the research timeline.

My great aunt Helen Roach had a one page note in her Roach Family Genealogy about her grandmother Ellen Emperor McEvoy.

"Tom, Jim, Cornelius and Lawrence Emperor left their home in France and went to Brosna (pronounced Bresna) Ireland, County Kerry, and married Irish girls.

Tom Emperor is the father of Mary Laughlin who lived in Kalamazoo, Kate Sweeney, who lived in Dowagiac, Michigan, Ellen McEvoy and Helen McShane.

Jim is the father of Father Emperor, Kate, Annie Jim and Ellen. Joe Noonan is the son of Ellen.

Lawrence's children were John, Ed, Cornelius, Mary and Jim. Mary married John Hanrahan.

Cornelius had two children whose names are unknown and who lives in New York state.

The above information was given to me by Agnes Hanrahan in 1964."

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Are Tom, Jim, Cornelius, and Lawrence Emperor, the sons of John and Ellen Emperor?

This information came from Tom Emperor's 1896 Michigan death record. The Emperor's sons always state they were from Ireland, never France, so this is a point of confusion. However, I have no information that parents John and Ellen Emperor ever came to the US. They probably died in County Kerry, Ireland or perhaps they never left France and died there.

1. Tom Emperor (1815-1896) married Mary Hogan (1816-1896)

Children:

John T. Emperor (1840-1914) married Margaret Ferris (1840-1902)

Mary Emperor (1841-1921) married John Laughlin (1832-1923)

Ellen Emperor (1843-1904) married Charles McEvoy (1841-1907)

Helen Emperor (1845-) married John McShane (-1867)

Catherine Emperor (1849-1925) married Hugh Sweeney (1842-1910)

2. James Emperor (1824-1910) married Catherine Quinlan (1838-1886)

James death record states his parents are James Emperor and Catherine Horgan.

Children:

Ellen Emperor (1856-) married Daniel Noonan (1856-)

John Emperor (1858-1890)

Catherine Emperor (1862-)

Anna Emperor (1866-)

Thomas J. Emperor (1868-1897)

Cornelius (1871-1905) He. is Father Emperor, a Roman Catholic Priest.

Margaret (1873-1892)

3. Lawrence Emperor (1828-) married Mary Shehea (also spelled Sheehy) (1828-1913).

Lawrence died in Ireland, Mary, his widow immigrated.

Children:

James P. Emperor (1855-1887)

Mary Emperor (1859-1948) married John Hanrahan (1854-1932)

Edward Emperor (1865-) married Ellen Kearney (1869-1900) and Delia King (1870-)

4. Cornelius Emperor (1831-bef.1910) married Catherine (1830-1900)

Children:

John Emperor (1862-)

Ellen Emperor (1869-) married Lawrence Collins (1861-)

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What I have discovered is that the parents of Tom, Jim, Cornelius, and Lawrence Emperor were John and Ellen Emperor. This information came from Tom Emperor's 1896 Michigan death record. The Emperor's sons always state they were from Ireland, never France, so this is a point of confusion. However, I have no information that the parents, John and Ellen Emperor, ever came to the US. They probably died in County Kerry, Ireland, or perhaps they never left France and died there.

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